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August 26, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 200006

Dear Mr. President:

We write to you outraged and with heavy hearts regarding the horrific events unfolding in Afghanistan following the calamitous withdrawal of U.S. forces and today's devastating loss of American service members. The rapid Taliban takeover that the world just witnessed was entirely foreseeable and preventable. Many in the halls of Congress have been warning of this for months, which means neither you nor your advisors should have been surprised by the outcome of your decision to proceed with a hasty withdrawal that abandoned our Afghan partners and allies around the world. Tragically, the decision to withdraw forces in this manner has created horrific conditions that have left our Afghan partners and American service members vulnerable to terrorist attacks.

With a small U.S. footprint and the commitment of U.S. enablers and air power, the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) were continuing to hold against the Taliban. The ANSF was accepting high casualty rates, numbering thousands per year, while the Taliban enjoyed freedom from attack and the ability to rest, refit, train, and recruit in neighboring Pakistan. As such, it is an outrage and deeply offensive that your administration would put the blame for this disaster on our Afghan partners. Rescinding U.S. air power is what allowed the Taliban to mass, maneuver, attack, and overwhelm Afghan forces. You did not need an intelligence assessment to anticipate that a unilateral and poorly planned withdrawal of the pillars supporting the ANSF would afford the Taliban advantage and ultimately decisive momentum. This policy course demonstrates a total lack of familiarity with the dynamics of the conflict, and has resulted in the complete unraveling of America's two-decade investment in Afghanistan.

Over the last few weeks, in shifting blame around, your administration has suggested that this disaster was largely the result of intelligence failures. To be clear, this was a planning failure—not an intelligence failure. With an intensifying drumbeat, the Intelligence Community (IC) has warned policymakers about Kabul's structural weaknesses, both military and political. Administration officials should have taken heed of the IC's warnings.

Mr. President, you ran on a platform of "America is back" yet the handling of this withdrawal undermines the security of America and our allies, and our standing in the world. America's adversaries, particularly China, Russia, and Iran, are exploiting this failure to message to the world that America is an unreliable partner. Global jihadists are now experiencing their greatest propaganda success since September

11th, which will inspire jihadists celebrating the Taliban's victory over the U.S. and motivate future terrorists. Twenty years after 9/11, Afghanistan is once again a safe-haven for terrorist groups such as al-Qa'ida and ISIS. Tragically, the Afghan people, and particularly those who served alongside our forces, encouraged civil society, and helped liberate women and girls, are doomed to suffer unspeakable brutality at the hands of the Taliban.

U.S. foreign policy has slowly evolved from a principal emphasis on the global terrorist threat to focusing on geopolitical competition. This calamity will stymie the shift, as the United States will undoubtedly be required to refocus its attention on the global terror threat soon to be radiating from the region in the wake of our having abandoned our ability to inhibit it. You have sought to assure the American public of a strong "over the horizon" capability to address terrorism born in Afghanistan. Appreciating how hard it is to maintain a successful counterterrorism capability, even when you have allies and proximity, we see this assurance as illusory. The distance and lack of insight as events unfold in Afghanistan will significantly degrade our ability to counter threats posed by the extremist organizations now rushing to fill the void left by the Afghan government and security forces.

As Members of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, we will continue our rigorous oversight of the IC's role in monitoring the situation in Afghanistan and the tribal regions of Pakistan for evolving terrorist threats to our nation as a result of this policy course. Over the coming days and weeks, we will be closely following intelligence assessments and plans as to how your administration will rebuild lost counterterrorism capability. In particular, we will pursue:

1. An assessment from the IC of the overall reduction in collection capability since the Taliban captured Kabul;
2. A presentation of intentions and plans for "over the horizon" counterterrorism capabilities moving forward;
3. Ongoing assessments of the evolving terrorism threat in the region and globally; and
4. Information about the status and plans to assist those remaining at-risk Afghan allies.

Thank you for your attention to these urgent matters.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
Vice Chairman



Roy Blunt
U.S. Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ben Sasse". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ben" and last name "Sasse" clearly distinguishable. It is positioned above a horizontal line.

Ben Sasse
U.S. Senator

CC:

Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines

Director of the Central Intelligence Agency William Burns